

Meeting:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	8 th October '07
Subject:	Service Delivery Arrangements for Children Looked After
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Clark, Corporate Director, Children's Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr. Janet Mote
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	List all documents attached which include information relevant to the report

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out to provide information relating to:

1. Background relating to recent service developments for CLA
2. Social Care CLA Team arrangements
3. Multi-agency CLA Team arrangements
4. CLA Life Chances Forum
5. CLA Charter

Recommendations:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Provide Member endorsement of the current service developments for CLA
2. Provide Member support for the future development of these services

Reason:

1. Improving life chances and outcomes for children looked after is a priority for the Council, Children's Services and the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership.
2. Social care practice and partnership working with children looked after includes a range of high profile key performance indicators and thresholds that are critical to our performance improvement plans.
3. Local arrangements for children looked after need to be effective, appropriately resourced, supported at every level across all areas of the Council/partnership and championed and promoted at every opportunity.

Section 2 – Report

Background:

Historically there has been a disparity between the life chances and outcomes for looked after children compared to that of their peers. Children looked after are some of the most vulnerable children in need in our community and deserve the best quality care possible, indeed the kind of care we would wish for our own children. Over recent years the Government has introduced a range of initiatives and measures to tackle this inequality. Most recently the "Care Matters" agenda has outlined the Government's current views to improve provision for children looked after.

In early 2006 Harrow Children's Services introduced a social care led initiative that culminated in a multi-agency consultation event at the Teacher's Centre in the summer of 2006. Care leavers, foster carers and a range of professionals from social care, health, education and the voluntary sector worked together on a number of exercises and activities to identify local skills and expertise and confirm future partner commitment. The outcome of the consultation event indicated that partner practitioners and managers were willing and able to work differently to utilise existing skills and resources to form a targetted intervention for children looked after.

A qualitative study undertaken by the DfES in 2006 identified four critical factors that were found to have a significant impact on improving placement stability for children looked after. Since placement stability is often the key to improve life chances and outcomes for children looked after this qualitative study was used to inform the evaluation of existing service provision and became the foundation for future planning. The four critical factors are;

- * effective diversion from care and early intervention
- * strong tracking and case planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence
- * increased placement choice
- * increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support to placements

As a result of the multi-agency consultation exercise an outline plan was proposed that committed Children's Services and partner agencies to a new and innovative way of working together and included the setting up of the following;

- Social Care CLA Team
- Multi-Agency CLA Team (A "Virtual" Team Around the Child approach)
- CLA Life Chances Forum
- CLA Charter

Current situation - summary of developments:

Effective diversion from care & early intervention:

- * Development of the 9 new Children's Centres
- * Development of the extended schools initiative
- * Continuation of excellent Education Welfare Service input to schools
- * Schools compact and Rapid Intervention Team approach for pupils at risk of exclusion
- * Development of the new Marlborough Pilot with schools promoting a successful families supporting families model of approach for pupils displaying conduct-type difficulties/disorders
- * Development of the Parenting Strategy to identify a range of support and interventions dependent on the level of need and delivered across universal and targeted/specialist services at the point of need
- * Review and re-organisation of social care "front door" arrangements resulting in significant improvements to assessment performance for children in need
- * Review and re-organisation of family support services resulting in new targeted/specialist social care Family Support Team working to prevent children becoming looked after, progress rehabilitation home where appropriate and support plans for permanency, where necessary

Tracking & Case Planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence:

There are a number of Panels that operate to gatekeep, quality assure, authorise and determine the care pathway for CLA. In social care there are four key Panels that have recently been reviewed to ensure that robust and effective arrangements are in place to monitor, review and track the progress of care planning and resource management. These include;

- Child Care Panel
- Care Proceedings & Permanence Tracking Panel
- Fostering Panel
- Adoption & Permanence Panel

In November 2007 the new Child Care Panel will be launched with a specific focus on targeting performance improvements in care planning and resource management. This Panel will consider all newly accommodated children, all those requiring a placement change and those in single agency funded residential care establishments.

In January 2006 a new Panel, the Care Proceedings and Permanent Tracking Panel, was established to bring together the legal, care planning and resource management issues for all children subject to public care proceedings, including those who are unable to return to their birth families and who require adoption/permanent alternative care.

The work of this Panel, and the relatively new partnership with "Coram" since September 2006, has already seen a significant improvement in the case management of care proceedings and the number of children adopted during 2007/08.

Increased Placement Choice:

An ability to consider the matching needs of a child looked after and the opportunity to consider a range of placement choices to meet that need is essential to ensure that a child is placed in the most appropriate placement possible. Identifying the needs of the child and matching them successfully with carers best placed to meet those needs provides a quality of care and stability of placement.

Because it is professional good practice, and because our performance is judged by the number of children in residential care compared to family placements and by the distance of each placement from Harrow, there is a concerted effort to place newly accommodated children looked after with local in-house foster care placements. Reviews have taken place of all in-house and private/voluntary foster care placements for children looked after. As a result some children looked after have been brought back from out of borough placements and placed with in-house foster carers.

Analysis of Harrow's children looked after populations has taken place to identify gaps in the current make up of our in-house foster carer cohort. Recent placement trends indicate a need for White UK carers, Muslim carers, carers for boys, teenagers and those able to care for siblings. In order to address these gaps targeted work has already taken place and is on-going in the local community to identify new foster carers.

In addition to looking at in-house foster carers work has been on-going with the local North West London Consortium and our own commissioners to identify a preferred provider list of Independent Foster Care Association providers to use when placement needs cannot be met in-house.

The opening of the new Honeypot Lane Residential Unit and the management arrangements with "Shaftesbury" have provided teenage children looked after with a state of the art local provision.

Multi-agency & multi-disciplinary support:

The following information explains the progress that has been made in realising the dedicated approach to local service provision with partners following the multi-agency consultation event in summer 2006;

Social Care CLA Team:

- * One of the four Children in Need Teams within the Children in Need & Looked After Service has become a dedicated CLA Team
- * Despite initial recruitment challenges a permanent Team Manager (Yeta Odusanya) is now established in post
- * A newly appointed Senior Practitioner (Siphiwo Pohlwana) is due to start work imminently
- * All permanent Social Workers are also in post (Sheron Gachette, Charmé Marais, Olinka Bocka and Misiwe Ngqondela)
- * The Team Administrator is Ingrid Small
- * The CLA Team criteria is established and being implemented for CLA in long term care, including those awaiting adoption/permanency
- * Case transfers and allocations have been completed for existing CLA

Multi-Agency "Virtual" CLA Team:

- * The Multi-Agency CLA Team is being developed to provide added value to the work with children looked after
- * The aim is to mobilise and co-ordinate the multi-disciplinary input of skilled and experienced practitioners to work alongside social care staff and around the child and his/her carers
- * A variety of working arrangements will be developed including co-location, secondment, surgeries, consultations, joint panel etc.,
- * Some partner practitioners have already been identified and professional clusters of associated health and education colleagues are forming
- * A schedule of on-site multi-agency practitioner meetings will be agreed in time for the completion of the Pinner Road refurbishment in November 2007

CLA Life Chances Forum:

- * There is a group of managers from Children's Service and the partnership who meet to lead, manage and support the focus and direction of the operational practice of the Multi-Agency CLA Team
- * In October '07 the Forum will agree the terms of reference for the Multi-Agency Team and identify the focus of the operational work
- * Critical issues include placement choice and stability, educational attainment health issues
- * The Forum's chair person is Jennifer Noble, Children in Need & Looked After Service Manager
- * The Forum communicates with and is governed by its relationship with Children's Services Management Team, the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

CLA Charter:

- * The CLA Life Chances Forum have drafted a CLA Charter
- * The CLA Charter sets out to identify the core offer or pledge that services commit to provide for every Harrow CLA

Recommendation:**Resources, costs & risks:**

The above plans have been/are being achieved without additional resources and at no additional cost. As such the risks in terms of resources and costs are negligible. The risks associated with failing to improve life chances and outcomes for individual children looked after are huge in terms of personal suffering and loss of opportunity and potential. The on-going need for costly intervention and support in adult years due to poor/inadequate care during childhood is well evidenced. Failure to take action to address service delivery and provision would inevitably lead to a decline in Children's Services performance that would in turn impact adversely on the overall performance of the Council and the Strategic Partnership. Failure to provide quality care may result in complaints, judicial review, child death or a serious incident leading to a serious case review and considerable media interest.

Staffing/workforce:

As a result of the successful implementation of the social care Workforce Strategy the permanency and stability of the workforce has improved considerably since February 2006. The mainstream social care teams in the Referral & Assessment and Children in Need & Looked After Services are virtually 100% permanently staffed. This in turn has provided much needed continuity of casework input and management for children looked after.

Equalities:

As a particularly vulnerable group of looked after children and young people, strategic and operational plans must be put in place to prioritise their needs, prevent them falling down gaps between services and ensuring they have all the necessary care and support to make sure they reach their true potential.

Financial Implications:

There are no additional/specific cost implications relating to the description of the service provision and initiatives referred to in this report since all the plans are being developed using existing skills and resources within social care and partner agencies.

Further work is required however to address the need for a dedicated resource for CLA educational achievement. Since the conclusion of the Gatsby Project, the voluntary redundancy of the newly proposed CLA Education Officer and the recently unsuccessful consortium bid for a Pilot Virtual Head Teacher, this area of work with children looked after requires an urgent review.

Performance Issues:

Performance:

Practice and intervention is robustly performance managed, as children looked after are a cross-cutting priority in the "Every Child Matters" outcomes framework. The following list details the key performance indicators, and thresholds, relating to work with children looked after:

PAF PI C19	Health of children looked after
PAF PI C24	Children looked after absent from school
PAF PI & KT A2	Educational qualifications of children looked after
PAF PI A4	Employment, education & training for care leavers
PAF PI B79	10 - 16 years children looked after in foster or adoptive placements
PAF PI & KT A1	Improved short term placement stability
PAF PI D78	Improved long term placement stability
PAF PI DIS 1111	Children looked after fostered by a relative or friend
PAF PI C23 & KT	Adoptions of children looked after
PAF PI C68	Timeliness of CLA Reviews
PAF PI C63	Participation of children looked after in Reviews
PAF PI C18	Final warnings, reprimands and convictions of children looked after
PAF PI DIS 1114	Children looked after cases allocated to a qualified social worker

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Bharat Jashapara	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 28.09.07.....		
Name: Rosemarie Martin	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 28.09.07.....		

*Delete the words "on behalf of the" if the report is cleared directly by Myfanwy or Hugh.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background Papers:
None.

;If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES